The Song of the City

Anna Louise Strong

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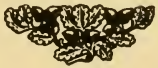
The Song of the City

By ANNA LOUISE STRONG

Author of "Storm Songs."



¶ *A collection of verses originally published in The Advance, The Chicago Record-Herald, and The Chicago Evening Post, together with a few additions.*

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To the City of Chicago
which
in spite of its smoke and dinginess
I love
for its poetry, its romance, and the
grandeur of its dreams.

"These are my lofty mountains"

The Song of the City

The song, the song of the city,
The song of the daily toil;
Of hurrying life, of maddening strife,
The song of the wild turmoil.

These are my lofty mountains,
Fifteen stories high;
From the narrow street at their shadowed feet
To the strip of smoke-hid sky.

This is the river I sing you,
The rushing river of men;
Surging on to the work at dawn,
And home at night again.

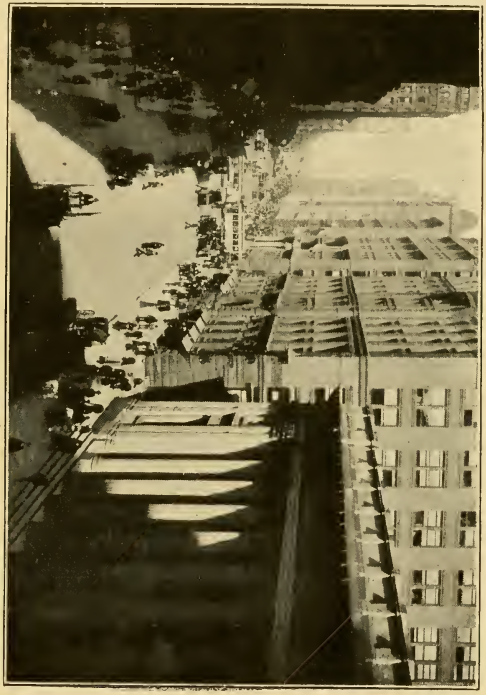
Home, while the smoke of the city
Glimmers with pale moon-gleams;
And the roar of day dies slowly away,
Hushed in the city of dreams.

Winter Dawn

A gloom rests over the city,
  Till about the hour of nine;
Then the gray of the streets grows lighter,
The rift of sky grows brighter,
And the tops of the tallest towers
  Gleam in the first sunshine.

Into the city shadow
  Creeps down the line of morn.
The weight of gloom is lifting,
And the smoke is upward drifting,
And the lights go out in the windows,
  For the light of day is born.

Then through the breaks in the buildings,
  Stream yellow shafts of sun,
And men who are coming and going
Glance up for a moment, knowing
That dawn has come to the city,
  Long after their day has begun.



"Into the city shadow creeps down the line of morn"

Rain

Long wreaths of smoke curl downward through
the gloom,
The air is heavy with approaching rain;
Above the streets the twisted fogs assume
Uncertain shapes which disappear again;
And now, no sound is in the darkened room,
But water plashing on the window-pane.

The City Lights

The stars of heaven are paler than the lights
That gleam beside them sixteen stories high;
Outlined against the blackness of the sky
Tall buildings glimmer through the frosty nights.

The stars of heaven in stately silence move
Beyond the circle of the window-gleams.
But dazzled by the fitful lower beams,
I think not of the light that shines above.

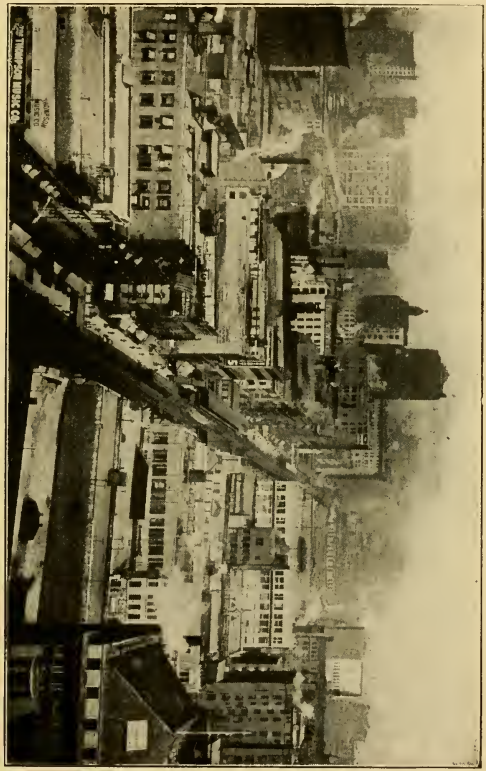
But when I speed upon the out-bound train,
The lights of earth, mist-hidden, fade away;
And quietly the stars resume their sway,
And shine in peace above the world again.

The Call of the City

Do you hear the call of the city,
  Do you mark how the men reply?
Thousands and hundreds of thousands,
  The throngs are hurrying by.
And those who have failed are many,
  And many are those who have won;
But the most of all the thousands
  Are the men who have just begun.

For "youth" is the call of the city;
  And the strong young men come forth
From the cheer of the southern plantations,
  From the desolate farms of the North.
From the old New England homestead,
  From the lonely ranch in the West,
They bring their strength to the struggle,
  They offer the city their best.

They give their youth and vigor
In eager sacrifice;
And out of the stress of their toiling
Shall the City of Beauty arise.
They are worn and spent with labor;
They are tossed aside again;
And the city is calling, calling,
For the lives of other men.



"The City is calling, calling"

City Comradeship

Face on face in the city, and when will the faces
end?
Face on face in the city, but never the face of a
friend;
Till my heart grows sick with longing and dazed
with the din of the street,
As I rush with the thronging thousands, in a lone-
liness complete.

Shall I not know my brothers? Their toil is one
with mine.
We offer the fruits of our labor on the same great
city's shrine.
They are weary as I am weary; they are happy
and sad with me;
And all of us laugh together when evening sets us
free.

Face on face in the city, and where shall our fortunes fall?
Face on face in the city,—my heart goes out to you all.
See, we labor together; is not the bond divine?
Lo, the strength of the city is built of your life and mine.

After Work

Weary, oh very weary, but glad that the work is done,
See, they have come from their toiling, the joy of return in their hearts.
The lights in the office-buildings have gone out one by one,
Till the tall, dark towers stand silent while the life of the city departs.

But under the gloom of their shadow the flaring lights of the street
Gleam in the wind-swept canyons where the river of men flows by;
And the rumble of cars and wagons, the tramp of a thousand feet,
Echoes from building to building and pierces the dull gray sky.

"The Wind-Swept Canyons"

Slowly the roar grows fainter, the toilers pass from sight,
There comes a lull in the thronging, a hurried moment of rest,
Then lights in places of pleasure flame out through shadowing night,
And men return to the city, on the eager, endless quest.

Life, there is life in abundance left when the work is done;
Life to be offered in service, or wasted in riotous play;
By day is the struggle for riches, but after the set of sun,
Men follow their hearts' true longing, in the last glad rush of the day.

The Toiler's Fear

There is one thing I fear—
  Not death, nor sharp disease,
Nor loss of friends I hold most dear,
  Nor pain, nor want—not these.

But the life of which men say:
  "The world has given him bread;
 nd what gives he to the world as pay
  For the crust on which he fed?"

I would pour out strength, and then
  When I have no strength to give,
No use, no share in the lives of men
  Who toil, and fight, and live—

Then let the end come fast,
  Whatever my past success;
That I may not cumber the ground at last,
  Nor linger in uselessness.

The Tenement Back-Yards

Close by the elevated the worst of the back-yards lie,
Barren, desolate spaces under an ashen sky,
Bottles and boxes and papers and pieces of glass and tin,
And rotted boards of fencing that shut the scrap-heap in.

Hopeless, dreary ash-piles—and yet there is laughter here;
And hearts bowed down with labor still trace the round of the year,
When the rays of first spring sunshine strike through the dingy pane,
And the broken, rag-stuffed windows are stripped of their rags again.

For over the dust and ashes roll surges of conquering life,
Life and the glory of living, the joy and the pain and the strife,
Love and the faith of loving, and wan hope's fitful gleams;
Ay, even the lost are haunted by the pallid beauty of dreams.

The Street Florist

They gleam through frosted windows—
  Roses yellow and red,
Through sleet and rain down-driven
  From gray clouds overhead;

Violets blue with May-time,
  And lilies tall and fair,
And sweet-pea blooms half-hidden
  In a mist of maiden-hair.

Close by the vision of color
  I pass, but I dare not stay;
For the call of the work is upon me,
  And the storm-wind whirls me away.

But under the city-shadow,
  My tired spirit thrills
With the red of bending roses,
  And the yellow of daffodils;

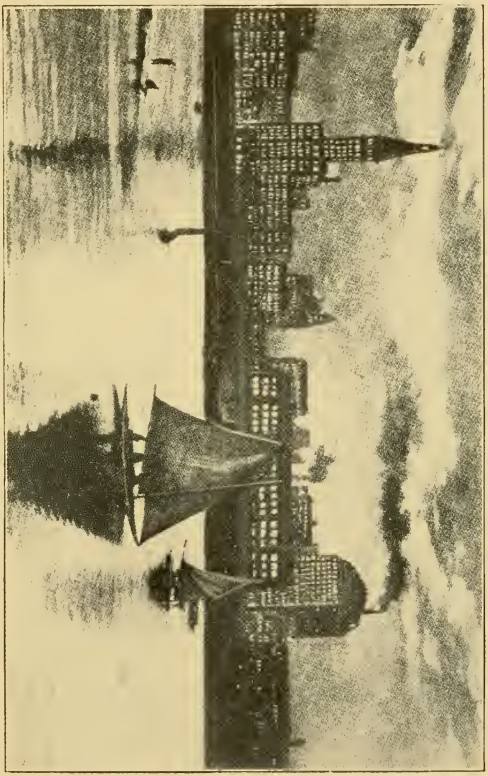
With the breath and beauty of summer,
Through the chill gray winter rain;
With the gleam of the springtime promise,
That June is coming again.

The City of Dreams

Not only when upon the eyes of men
Merciful sleep has fallen, and when beams
Of moonlight strike the towers—not only then
The city has its dreams.

But through the throbbing of the daily strife,
And in the haunts of laughter and of tears,
Beside each life there runs another life,
Woven of hopes and fears.

When hearts grow weary in the office-room,
Strange visitants invade the dingy halls;
And through the heaviness of city gloom
The light of promise falls.



"When beams of moonlight strike the towers"

Glory of dreams and fair imaginings,
Phantoms of hope, and old-time happiness,
Sweet memories of half-forgotten things,
High visions of success.

And though no heart is bold enough to ask
Radiant fulfilment for those golden gleams,
Yet may God pity him who has a task
Unglorified by dreams.

City Romance

Yes, it is here they meet.
Under the corner clock is the trysting-place.
And the girl who comes with happy, hurrying feet
Keeps time by its dingy face.

Swiftly the world flies past,
With the pitiless glare of the arc-lamps bright above.
But the press of the thronging thousands holds them fast,
In the solitude of love.

The strain of the toiling day
Is gone in one glad smile as the lovers meet.
Thrilled with joy of youth they hurry away,
Lost in the crowded street.

That clock has told the hour
For a hundred loving hearts that now are cold;
For thoughtless hands that crushed life's perfect flower,
For loves in peace grown old.

Wherever the wanderers be,
Their hearts once throbbed with a passion deep and true;
And the love that touched their lives with ecstacy
Was the purest thing they knew.

Love—there is love for all,
And the blessed promise of youth is everywhere—
Out on the farms where the apple-blossoms fall,
And here in the city-square.

A Valentine

Through the dust and smoke of the city,
If swift fly the hours or slow,
Comes a vision of fields where we wandered,
And it seems so long ago.
But I dream, in the falling shadows,
Of glad days yet to be;
For I love you, love you, love you,
And I know that you love me.

So I write you a verse and a letter,
For the sake of auld lang syne,
For the sake of fair times coming,
And of good Saint Valentine.
And the love this day betokens,
Is ours the whole year through,
For you love me, love me, love me,
And you know that I love you.

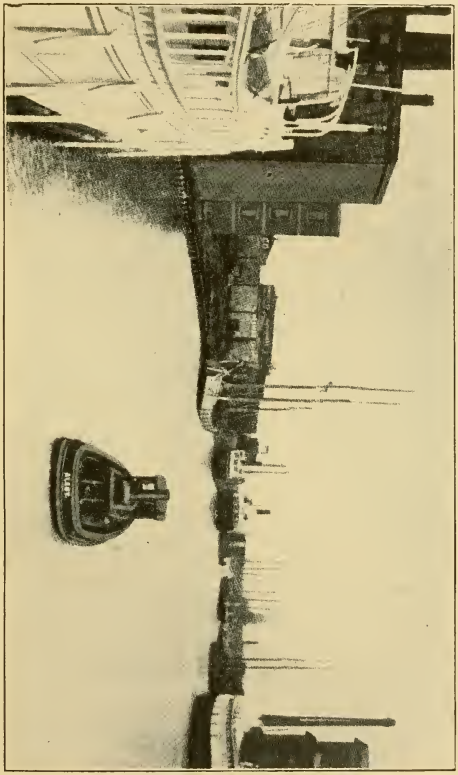
The Return

From the dim twilight of the northern wood,
From the dull boom of surf-beats on the shore,
The steamer bears me to the south once more,
Calmed with sweet mysteries of solitude.

I have set my face to the land tonight,
As the sun drops over the sea,
With a stifled sigh for days gone by,
And a dread of the days to be.

Tall piles of steel and granite front the bay;
The sun flares dimly through the tawny mist;
The water's gold-shot green and amethyst
Fade by the shore to sluggish, ashen gray.

I have set my face to the land tonight,
And the long gray line of foam,
But my heart is far where the pine-woods are,
And how shall I call it home?



"Across the shadowed waterway of ships"

Yet while the daylight into darkness slips,
Upon my soul the ancient magic falls;
I hear the city's old resistless calls
Across the shadowed water-way of ships.

I have set my face to the land tonight,
To the swirl of the narrow street,
To the arc-lamp's flare in the city square,
And the rythmic tramp of feet.

Let quietness and beauty haunt the glen;
There is no rest along these smoke-hung shores.
No rest—no; but the glory of the wars,
The joy of work, the roaring life of men.

I have set my face to the land tonight,
And I seek no more to roam,
For my heart beats strong with the triumph-song,
And here have I built my home.

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